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Spies Make No Secret of Support for Bush By JOAN MOWER

Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) George Bush can count on solid backing Nov. 8 from the nation's former spies, who are making no secret of their support for the Republican candidate.

This is 99 percent Bush country," said Henry Houkal, a former CIA official attending a two-day annual convention of the Association of Former Intelligence Officers over the weekend.

In the tightly knit intelligence community, former spies feel a kinship with Bush, who served as the CIA's director for a year in 1976 in the Ford administration. President Jimmy Carter dismissed Bush after the Democrats regained the White House.

The association does not formally take stands on political issues, but it isn't difficult to determine most members' allegiance.

James E. Treher, a former FBI agent from Pittsburgh who worked in counterintelligence, said he feared that Democrat Michael Dukakis, if elected, would put "liberal restrictions" on the CIA.

He said that could result in the "greatest disaster" in intelligence-gathering since the so-called Church committee, the congressional investigation that revealed the CIA had tried to murder foreign leaders and destabilize governments.

Bush found the CIA reeling from the committee's revelations.

The consensus among several ex-spies was that Bush boosted the agency's morale in his short tenure by going along with the recommendations of the professional staff and interfering little in their work.

Houkal that he was involved in a policy change and Bush "just signed off on it."

"It was a tranquil operation," added L.A. Shirito, who now works for Union Carbide. "I am a Bush admirer from those days."

Despite his hands-off management style, Bush formed some close ties at the agency, including one with Donald Gregg, an ex-CIA man who has served as one of the vice president's top foreign police advisers.

Like others, Houkal said Bush will probably "leave the agency alone" if he moves to the White House. William Webster, a former FBI chief, was appointed to head the agency after William Casey, President Reagan's friend, died in May 1987.

One reason the former sleuths want to see Republicans remain in control of the White House is their belief that intelligence agencies have prospered during the last eight years.

Several present and former CIA officials praised Casey for beefing up the agency and improving its analytical capabilities.

Robert M. Gates, the CIA deputy director, said Congress also has helped the agency by boosting its appropriations in the last

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decade. Congressional review of the intelligence process "has given a growing number of members of Congress an idea of what we really do for a living."

Douglas George, a CIA analyst, said he worked closely with Casey on arms control issues, and the former CIA head never leaned on staffers to play with the facts so they jibed with policy views. "He kept his fingers off intelligence," George said.

But Helene Boatner, another CIA analyst, said Casey had strong, forceful views that may have prompted the analysts to self-censor their product. "His personal views tended to have an impact," she said.

She noted, however, there is always a tension between analysts and policy-makers because the facts never fit squarely with the views of those who formulate policy. "The news from the analysts is usually bad," she said.

Boatner was critical, though, of Bob Woodward's book, "Veil: The Secret Wars of the CIA 1981-1987." The book describes how Casey and Reagan committed the nation to new and expanded covert wars in Central America and elsewhere.

"I know things in the book that are true and I know things in the book that are dead wrong," she said.

Since the early 1980s, the analysts said, gathering and interpretation of information has improved. The Reagan administration has invested heavily in equipment to collect facts and in training analysts.

"The nation had made a pretty spiffy investment in people," George said.

Among other things, the CIA has sought more experienced analysts, expanded their training and tried to improve their work by giving them more time to travel and take sabbaticals.

"They are a promising lot," Boatner said of the new breed of analysts.

Gates said the agency is doing "as well if not better than we ever have" in recruiting with about 150,000 inquiries a year. The CIA entertains about 1,000 serious applications a month. Still, the CIA has problems recruiting specialists such as "world class chemists and nuclear engineers."

John Greaney, AFIO's executive director, said 250 people attended the convention, up from last year. The association, which has a membership of over 3,000, is dedicated to promoting strong intelligence operations.

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